

WHAT IS IDENTITY THEFT?

Every year thousands of people are victimized by identity thieves. The theft of your identity can leave you with a poor credit rating and a ruined reputation that may take months or even years to correct. Meanwhile, due to your seemingly dreadful credit history, you may be denied jobs, loans, check-writing privileges, or the right to rent or buy accommodations. You may even risk arrest and having your story viewed with suspicion.

How can my identity get stolen?

Do you know how to recognize attempts to steal your identity? Try this **CONSUMER CHALLENGE** and find out!

1. Identity theft is:

- a. Switching places with your identical twin;
- b. The title of the next Grisham book;
- c. Using key pieces of someone else's personal identifying information in order to impersonate them and commit various crimes in that person's name.

Answer: c. Besides basic information like name, address, and telephone number, identity thieves look for social security numbers, driver's license numbers, credit card and bank account numbers, as well as bank cards, telephone calling cards, birth certificates or passports. This information enables the identity thief to commit numerous forms of fraud. An identity thief will go on spending sprees under the victim's name. He or she will take over the victim's financial accounts, open new accounts in the victim's name, and divert the victim's financial mail to the thief's address. An identity thief will apply for loans, credit cards, and welfare benefits, rent apartments and goods, establish services with utility companies and much more using the victim's personal information. As soon as they have spent all the money they can get under that person's name, the thief moves on, leaving the victim to suffer the consequences.

2. Shoulder surfing is:

- a. A new type of surfboard;
- b. When someone looks over your shoulder to learn your password or PIN number;
- c. A vacation resort.

Answer: b. Criminals acquire account information while hanging out in banks and ATM lines, or at airports to get calling card number and information that they later sell to others. They get the money, the victim gets the bill.

3. Dumpster Diving is:

- a. A new water sport;
- b. The official term for a belly flop;

- c. Thieves scavenging for documents in commercial or residential dumpsters.

Answer: c. Thieves look for canceled checks, bank statements, pre-approved credit cards, etc. They then use this information to steal your identity. Protect yourself by shredding or tearing up your canceled checks, statements, and any pre-approved credit card offers and other similar junk mail.

- 4. A skimmer is:
 - a. A net used when crabbing;
 - b. An electronic device used by criminals;
 - c. The new Honda SUV.

Answer: b. A skimmer is an electronic device used by criminals to “swipe” your credit card without your knowledge and store information that enables them to use your account. The machine copies information from the card’s magnetic strip, and the thief then creates a counterfeit card with the same account data. As the counterfeit card is a copy of your card, the thief has instant access to your account and can withdraw money or charge items just as you can. One skimming device alone can hold information from more than 200 accounts. At an average loss of \$3,100 per card, a single device can wreak havoc. Magnetic stripe readers are openly sold on the Web because they have legitimate purposes, such as at trade shows and hotels.

- 5. Opt-out is:
 - a. Not joining your colleagues for a drink after work;
 - b. A new take-out restaurant;
 - c. A good way to restrict your financial institutions from sharing your personal information.

Answer: c. Federal law now requires banks, credit card companies, brokerage firms and insurance companies to send you a “privacy notice” each year – including a toll-free number or form to prohibit them from selling your data to unaffiliated “third-party” companies. If you choose to deny the company the right to sell your data to other companies, you are exercising your right to “opt-out”. You may “opt-out” at any time. You may also ask your financial institution not to disclose information to its own affiliated companies. And you can tell other businesses you want to opt out of them sharing your information – from your telephone or cable company to charities, stores, catalog companies and web sites.

- 6. A do not call list is:
 - a. The best way to stop your daughter’s boyfriends from calling;
 - b. A list of stores you don’t want to shop in again;
 - c. A telemarketer’s nightmare.

Answer: c. The Telemarketing Sales Rule requires a telemarketer to remove your name from their calling list and not call you again if you make that specific request – but you

must tell the caller specifically **“please do not call me again”** or **“put me on your do not call list”** before they will actually take your name off their telemarketing list. You can remove your name from most telemarketing lists by contacting: the Direct Marketing Association, Telephone Preference Service, P.O. Box 9014, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9014, or online at <http://www.the-dma.org>.

7. A “Sniffer” is:
- a. A software program;
 - b. A dog;
 - c. A cold.

Answer: a. A “sniffer” is a software program designed to “sniff out” and capture your financial data, passwords, addresses or other personal information being sent over networks. It is usually hidden in an email attachment and activates secretly when you open the email, sending the information back to the hacker without your knowledge. The best prevention is not to open emails from people whose names you don’t recognize – and regularly scan your computer with a virus detection program.

8. “Spoofing” is:
- a. Watching “Blazing Saddles;”
 - b. Sending false messages on the internet;
 - c. The newest Olympic exhibition sport.

Answer: b. Sending false messages in an effort to collect private information. For example, by posing as travel agents or other service providers, a thief can make off with your credit card number once it has been entered to buy a ticket or service.

So how did you score?

A few simple precautions can protect you from the devastating consequences of identity theft. You can find more information, including tips on protecting your identity from our website, www.ag.state.nd.us or from <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/>.